WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congressman Jeff Fortenberry will today offer an amendment to H.R. 1, the FY11 House continuing resolution, to prohibit U.S. military assistance to the African nation of Chad.

In 2008, Congress passed the Fortenberry-authored Child Soldiers Prevention Act as part of the William Wilberforce Human Trafficking Victims Protection Act.   This bill declared that the US would not provide military assistance to countries found guilty of child conscription. The government of Chad, a military partner to which the U.S. provides assistance, was found guilty of using child soldiers in the 2010 State Department Trafficking-in-Persons Report. However, as the law provided, Chad was granted a national security interest waiver with the hopes that Chad would take concrete strides toward ending this human rights violation.

Fortenberry issued the following statement:

"It is hard for us to envision a 13 year-old child put in military fatigues, a gun in their hand, and made to fight—but it happens around the world today. With the withdrawal of the UN mission in Chad at the end of 2010, children as young as 13 are being preyed upon as child soldiers. In this past week, the United Nations and a respected international human rights organization both issued reports warning of Chad's continued flouting of our law. International media outlets have given attention to this issue in recent days.

"Using children as soldiers is wrong. Congress declared in 2008 that children belong on playgrounds, not battlegrounds, and I offer this amendment as a challenge to our government for a quick resolution.

"William Wilberforce, the British statesman and unyielding abolitionist for whom our anti-human trafficking law is named, said, 'You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know.'

"We must make it clear to the government of Chad that we now know. And we cannot look the other way."

Fortenberry is the Vice Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights.

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